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ABSTRACT

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is introduced. Some historical background and an overview of preference and types are given. Applications of the MBTI are discussed, focusing on educational issues concerning the study of learning styles. Learning styles are defined according to D. H. Kalsbeek, G. Lawrence, and others. Each dichotomous (two-sided) preference scale is discussed as to the aspect of learning style it measures, each having a unique importance in the relation of the MBTI to learning style. Each dichotomy's learning style characteristics are discussed, and an illustration is given as an example of how each type's learning style can be assessed. The MBTI measures not only personality type, but also each type's way of most effectively learning new material. The benefits of such knowledge are numerous. (Contains 9 references.) (Author/SLD)

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RUNNING HEAD: Relationship between Myers-Briggs and Learning Style

ED 381 577

The Relationship Between the Myers-Briggs Personality Types and Learning Styles

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Abstract

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is introduced; some historical background and an overview of preferences and types is given. Applications of the MBTI are discussed, focusing on the educational uses concerning the study of learning styles. Learning styles are defined according to D.H. Kalsbeek, G. Lawrence, and others. Each dichotomous (two-sided) preference scale is discussed as to what aspect of learning style it measures, each having a unique importance in the relation of the MBTI to learning style. Each dichotomy's learning style characteristics are discussed, and an illustration is given as an example of how each type's learning style can be assessed.

The Relationship Between the Myers-Briggs Personality Types and Learning Styles

The Myers-Briggs Type indicator (MBTI) was developed by the mother-daughter team of Katherine C. Briggs and Isabel Briggs Myers. They began developing this personality test in the summer of 1942, basing their ideas on Carl G. Jung's theory of psychological types. Katherine Briggs introduced Jung's theory to her daughter while educating Isabel at home. Both women had a vested interest in understanding people's personalities, and in studying the reasons people behaved in the ways that they did. The tragedies of World War II stirred Isabel Myers' desire to do something that might help people understand each other and avoid destructive conflicts (Myers, 1991). She decided to devise a method of using Jung's theory for her purpose. Myers and Briggs, neither of whom had ever had any sort of formal psychological or statistical training, began the meticulous task of developing am item pool that would test attitudes, behaviors, perceptions, and feelings of the different psychological types, according to their understanding of them (Myers, 1991). Through the women's rigorous work, frequent test tryouts and revisions, and perseverance through many people's negative attitudes regarding their efforts, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator was created.

Applications

General

"The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator has become the most widely used personality measure for non-psychiatric populations" (Myers, 1991, p. xii). The indicator involves four preferences, each of which has two sides. They include Extravert vs. Introvert, Sensing vs. Intuitive, Thinking vs. Feeling, and Judgment vs. Perception. Through the analysis of the answers on the MBTI, a type is assessed for each individual. There are sixteen types, each being a combination of the four preferences. Types are illustrated by four letters, such as "INFJ." The four letters indicate the preferred side of each of the dichotomous preferences, though both sides of each dichotomy is used by a person at one time or another. "A useful analogy to this is *handedness*; a person uses both hands at different times, but reaches first, or uses most, the preferred hand" (Briggs, 1987, p. 3). Because the MBTI is concerned with differences in individual attitudes and functions, the indicator is used in a wide range of situations and for a variety of purposes. The MBTI is used in counseling, in business and industry, in public schools, and at colleges and universities. Some advantages of the MBTI are that it provides personal insight in a positive constructive way; it is almost completely self-administering; it has no time limits; it has several forms to accommodate various purposes; and the results are easy to interpret and understand (Briggs, 1987).

Educational

The MBTI has proven to be useful for educational purposes. It is used with students ranging from junior high to college. "In 1977, the first edition of a research journal on psychological types was published" (Briggs, 1987, p. 3). The MBTI not only identifies type in students, but also helps them to understand their various learning styles as well. Through the indicator's thorough analysis and explanation of each type, a student can come to know how he/she understands material most effectively--to know what his/her learning style is.

Learning Styles

Definitions

The study of learning styles is a relatively new field. In developing fields, terms used are often ambiguous. This is also true in the study of learning styles. Provost states, "learning style can mean anything from hemisphericity to one's method of sharpening a pencil" (1984, p. 182). In addition, Kalsbeek (1989) has stated that "learning style can be understood as a person's preferred approach to information processing, idea formation, and decision making; the attitudes and interests that influence what is attended to in a learning situation and a disposition to seek learning environments compatible with these personal profiles, or types" (Cooper, 1991, p. 699). These styles are unique to the individual, for each person has his/her own way of learning best. For example, some people learn visually, some learn through listening, and others learn through a combination of both methods. Whatever the particular learning style of a person, identifying and understanding this style can lead to successful and/or improved learning. The MBTI is a useful tool in

determining learning styles as they relate to personality types.

The learning style definitions used in accordance with the MBTI, as stated by Gordon Lawrence (1984), are the following:

1. Cognitive style in the sense of preferred or habitual patterns of mental functioning: information processing and the formation of ideas and judgments.
2. Patterns of attitudes and interests that influence what a person will attend to in a potential learning situation.
3. A disposition to seek out learning environments compatible with one's cognitive style, attitudes, and interests, and to avoid environments that are not congenial.
4. A disposition to use certain tools and to avoid others.

(Provost, 1984, pp. 182-183)

Lawrence also stated that "the MBTI is a predictor of learning style, but cannot actually mandate how a student will write, read, and study" (Provost, 1984, p. 183). There are many factors, in addition to particular learning styles, which affect how a student actually behaves, including parental influence, learning environment, maturity level, self-motivation, and attitude. Thus, a perfect correlation between learning style and personal type is not possible. However, the MBTI can predict what kinds of environments, instructional tools, and behaviors hinder or encourage learning for a particular student (Provost, 1987).

In analyzing the learning styles for each type, it is most effective to simply analyze each of the four dichotomous preferences, and to apply these analyses to each of the sixteen types. Each preference has its own unique characteristics, thus indicating specific learning style characteristics for each. It is important to remember that each of the

types can be applied to real people in real learning situations. As learning styles are studied, it is also important to keep their practical application in mind. As one teacher said:

> One of the great frustrations of teaching is that you are always robbing Peter to pay Paul. You design something to reach one group of students, knowing that in so doing, you are going to turn off another group. It is somewhat comforting to know that there is a perfectly understandable explanation. (Myers, 1991, p. 147)

Preferences

Extravert vs. Introvert

The Extravert/Introvert (EI) scale measures where students tend to focus their attention. "This dimension can indicate the degree of a student's reliance on activity" (Provost, 1984, p. 183). This information can be valuable for both the student and teacher, because it will affect each of them in almost every learning situation.

The Extravert tends to focus on the outer world of people and things. These students are motivated by what goes on in the outer world, and tend to direct their energy there as well. "These students think and learn best when talking, they like cooperative learning groups, and they rely more on trial-and-error than on forethought when solving problems" (Sakamoto and Woodruff, 1992, p. 6). They tend to get bored with long, slow jobs, and do not do as well when forced to keep everyone else's pace. These students like action and variety; therefore, a classroom full of group discussion, hands-on activity, and "active breaks from the solitary tasks of reading and writing" (Provost, 1984, p. 183) would best facilitate the Extravert's learning.

In contrast, Introverts are motivated by their inner worlds, not needing a lot of outside energy to drive their interests. These students tend to be most interested in having a quiet learning environment where they are able to think things out and concentrate on the task at hand. Introverts, in most cases, would rather work alone than in a group (Sakamoto and Woodruff, 1992) because they do not like their thoughts to be interrupted. They are more comfortable than the Extravert is with the lecture-based teaching format. In addition, they sometimes perform poorly during in-class discussions due to a lack of time to anticipate discussion questions. "Jung called introverts Prometheans (Greek for "fore-thinkers") because they do most of their thinking before they act" (Provost, 1991, p. 184). More often than not, schools are structured in favor of the Introvert, with students sitting quietly in rows while the teacher lectures to them.

Sensing vs. Intuition

The Sensing/Intuition scale (SN) measures how the student acquires information, or finds out about things. The greatest contrast between Sensing and Intuitive students is how they direct their perceptions. Sensing is a term used for "perception of the observable by way of the senses," while Intuition is the term used for "perception of meanings, relationships, and possibilities by way of insight" (Lawrence, 1982, p. 7).

Sensing students focus on the realities of a situation. They are fact- and detail-oriented, and have A great capacity for realism--for seeing the world as it actually is. They work well with what is "given," and prefer to work with proven procedures and theories. Sensing students like concrete things which they can see, touch, and handle (Cooper, 1991). They are less likely than the Intuitive student to use their imaginations

while learning and enjoy exercising the knowledge that they already possess more than learning new things. Practicality, the here-and-now, and the book-facts are tools which the Sensing learner uses to decipher new material. Sensing students are "good at memorizing a great number of facts and numbers" (Sakamoto and Woodruff, 1992, p. 7). Thus, they are likely to excel in academic subjects such as history because they can memorize the important facts and dates which are vital to learning history.

On the other hand, Intuitive students are not fact-minded students. They recognize meanings that go beyond the information from the senses--they look at the "big picture" and try to grasp the overall relationship between concepts.

> Intuitive types are less likely to be patient with routine or overly-structured mechanical approaches to learning. They desire and seek the opportunity to let their imaginative instincts work, and thus tend to prefer open-ended assignments. (Provost, 1987, p. 184)

These students trust their first "hunches" about answers to test questions and "seem to enjoy the challenge of timed-tests" (Myers, 1980, p. 63). The average classroom hinders Intuitive students' learning in that most often, facts and details are forced into the students' minds, leaving little room for the imagination to be exercised. For this reason, some students lose their creative and imaginative abilities as they go through the school systems.

Thinking vs. Feeling

The third dichotomous preference scale is Thinking vs. Feeling (TF).

This scale measures how students make decisions. "This dimension is most useful for providing insights into the affective domain of learning styles" (Provost, 1984, p. 184). Thinking "is the term used to define a logical decision-making process, aimed at an impersonal finding," while Feeling "is a term for a process of appreciation, making judgments in terms of a system of subjective, personal values" (Lawrence, 1982, p. 8). Both are considered rational processes because they are methods of decision making.

Thinking students make decisions after analyzing and weighing all of the evidence. They learn best when given a clear, objective rationale, and they like giving and receiving critical analysis. They solve problems according to "right versus wrong" principles (Myers, 1980, p. 68). In addition, Thinking students perform best when given a set of performance criteria--when they know what to expect. They tend to be blunt, want to make their points quickly, and often include markers of orderly, systematic thought in their talking. These markers are words such as "thus," "therefore," and "in conclusion" (Provost, 1984, p. 185). Thinking students may not work well in group-centered classrooms because they tend to overlook other's personal feelings. They often take leadership positions, however, because they can get things done very efficiently (Provost and Anchors, 1991).

In contrast, Feeling students are motivated by both their own feelings and by the feelings of others. They make their decisions based on person-centered values, tending to think with their hearts instead of their heads. These students do not usually like rigid, strict classroom environments or assignments, but they like dealing with school work and other students through group communication. When learning something

new, these students like to know how the material will be beneficial to humankind as a whole--how they can apply it in the real world in order to help people. In addition, they often take criticism very personally (Myers, 1980) and learn best when they receive personal encouragement. These students are good mediators in the classroom and even make very effective peer counselors and student tutors. Their sympathetic, tactful ways tend to make them well-liked and appreciated by other students and teachers, as well.

Judging vs. Perceiving

The final MBTI preference scale is Judging vs. Perceiving (JP). This scale is most useful in measuring whether or not students prefer structured learning environments (Provost, 1984). The environment is a very important part of the learning style, in that most students have or develop very definite preferences as to where they learn best. Often, when they are not comfortable with their environment, they will not learn, or they will not learn as effectively as possible.

Judging students prefer a very structured learning environment. They like deadlines and goals to be set, and they do not often waver from the "planned." These students get assignments done on time or early, are often overachievers, and may even decide things too quickly because they simply want to "get it done." Judging types find satisfaction in completing assignments, writing papers, reading books, and in giving oral presentations (Provost, 1984). The feeling of accomplishment is important to them--they find this feeling in getting things done. Judging students often put too much pressure on themselves and they fear failure as they strive to reach each and every set goal. Classes are often structured perfectly to facilitate the Judging students learning in that they

usually involve set due dates and strict curriculums. They do not, however, often take the Perceiving students into consideration.

The Perceiving student likes a flexible, spontaneous environment that is open to change and exploration. They do not learn well in the structured environment and are more curious than they are decisive (Myers, 1980). They often postpone tasks, doing them either right before they are due, or turning them in late (Sakamoto and Woodruff, 1992). These students tend to be underachievers, most likely because they do not enjoy their learning environment. They like open-ended assignments and enjoy discussion-oriented classrooms. Due to their lack of structure, Perceiving students often over-commit themselves, working on several projects at once, and delaying closure on any of them. They do not function well in the "average" classroom, and teachers often think them to be irresponsible. The Perceiving student would work most effectively in a self-paced learning situation, which is not very common in the school systems.

An illustration of how each of these analyses of preference are applied to personality types can be seen in the example of the "INFJ"-type students. These students, in most cases, prefer to work alone, due to a need to deeply concentrate when learning. They succeed through perseverance, originality, and a desire to please their instructors (Myers, 1980). They are hard workers and are often liked and respected by their teachers and fellow classmates. "INFJ" students are often painstakingly organized; hence, they usually get their work done on time, and are then considered "good" students. In processing new material, these students prefer to consider theory before application. In addition, the Intuitive

part of the students keeps them spontaneous and open to various possibilities in the classroom.

Through the analysis of each of the preference scales and their applications to learning styles, it is clear that the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is a useful educational tool. The MBTI can measure not only a student's personality type, but can also assess each type's way of most effectively learning new material. The atmosphere in which a student feels most comfortable learning, the ways in which he/she interacts with other students and teachers, a student's organization and thought process, and a student's problem-solving methods are assessed through an analysis of each type.

Conclusion

The benefits of knowing a student's learning styles are numerous. First, through an understanding of his/her learning styles, the student knows more accurately how he/she can better process and put new information to use. Second, the teacher will know how each student is most likely interpreting new information and whether or not a particular lesson or project is suitable to each student's learning style. In addition, knowledge of learning styles can help a teacher better understand each student's strong and weak points and can promote better communication in the classroom.

Realizing that not all students learn the same way, and that each, in fact, is rather unique in his/her styles of learning, provides a more "aware" and positive atmosphere in which learning can take place. In fostering students' strengths, encouraging them to learn in their own unique ways, and creating a warm, welcoming environment for a variety of learning styles, productive, pertinent learning is inevitable.

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